



Contesting the Visualisation of Gaza

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Contesting the visualization of Gaza

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Contesting the Visualisation of Gaza

During July-August 2014 it is estimated that Israel dropped 18-20,000 tons of explosives on Gaza. This led to the deaths of over 2,100 people with homes, hospitals, schools and whole districts obliterated to rubble. Photographs played a crucial role in mediating this devastation within corporate media, social media as well as in street protests and pickets. This paper will explore the dominant visual discourses that through both regulatory frameworks as well as political positioning supported Israeli PR agendas to normalise Israeli perspectives and reinscribe Palestinians as both political and social 'other'. It will consider the success with which citizens both within Gaza and outside - as protestors and journalists - acted to challenge the corporate media's control over the mediation of the bombing, considering the visual strategies they employed on social media and in street protests to influence the public's understanding of the Palestinian plight.

In 2009 scholars argued that the entrenchment of pre-established discourses in the visual economy of Gaza constrained our understanding of images produced by Palestinians to counter the Israeli military perspective, leading to the absorption of pro-Palestinian images in a dominant visual field (Jones 2011). Employing Ariella Azoulay's concept of a citizenry of photography (2008) which suggests a space that challenges the force of government in the struggle to recover lost and marginal histories, I will consider how photographs by both Palestinians and their supporters during the 2014 bombing should be understood in the context of wider communication ecologies. Visual meanings are contingent on both the agency of the viewer and the context within which the images operate and as such I argue that images circulated by Palestinians and their supporters did intervene to (a) challenge and expose Israeli barbarity through the production, exposure and circulation of images of extreme suffering and (b) through the space of social media intervened to widen the visual discourse surrounding Gaza.

The visibility of Gaza in 2009

Key strategies that operated in the mainstream media to constrain our understanding of the Palestinian situation in 2009 included the decision by Israel to prevent international journalists from entering Gaza, which situated international news agencies in Israeli spaces. The banning of international journalists was never fully intended to hide images of actuality as the Israeli army were well aware that there were plenty of Palestinian journalists and photographers who would circulate images from the strip. The

control rather permitted the circulation of some images while ‘politicizing’ others as inevitably biased. (Azoulay 2009; Campbell 2009, Jones 2011) Strategic images by the Israeli military were also distributed to the media to create visual frameworks that placed the viewer in a space which normalised the Israeli military gaze and therefore presented Palestinian militants as the inevitable ‘other’. (Jones 2011) Such practices replayed colonial structures of power that attributed humanness to the coloniser and constructed the colonized as ‘other’. (Hall 1998; Pieterse 1995)

Racialised and politicized discourses in the global media also impacted on our understanding of the 2009 Gaza bombing to suggest that even images produced by Palestinians to challenge the Israeli military perspectives were absorbed in a pre-established discourse that regulated how they could be understood. (Campbell 2009; Jones 2011; Richardson 2004; Said 1979) Butler has highlighted ‘how we respond to the suffering of others and how we respond to criticisms, how we articulate political analyses, depend upon a certain field of perceptible reality’ that has already been established. (Butler 2007:951) This is especially true of photographs, which despite their appeal as evidence able to convey an ‘unmediated truth’, (Sontag 2003:6) are never fixed in meaning. Photographs rather operate as statements that are the process of ‘mutual (mis)recognition’ (Azoulay 2009:25).

Economies of regulation also operated through international news channels which censored and edited suffering in the name of ‘taste and decency’, despite the cry for immediacy and authenticity. (Jones 2011) Other regulatory economies such as ‘the balanced story’ also privileged Israeli stories because of the difference in the number of casualties which led to Israeli’s being identified and visualized as individuals with personal lives while Palestinians remained unnamed and invariably only represented through images of abject suffering.

Most significantly, however, the pictorial coverage as Campbell asserted represented the assault as ‘a temporary humanitarian catastrophe rather than a political episode of carefully planned and orchestrated violence’. (Jones 2011:4) The bombing of Gaza, he argued needs to be understood in terms of ‘controlled and structured visibilities’ where the imaging of a ‘critical emergency’, ‘deflect(s) attention from the way the exception is the norm, the temporary is permanent’, (Campbell 2009:33) Gaza is always on the brink of a disaster, with or without the bombing.

Corporate media coverage of Gaza in July 2014

In 2014 it is clear that these patterns of meaning have been strengthened by an increasingly organized Israeli PR machine that has sought to consolidate its strategies post criticism of the 2009 bombing. I will explore the visual discourse and narratives employed on the BBC news website during the first 24 hours of the conflict as a UK example of media coverage which consolidated a Zionist¹ discourse in line with the requirements laid out by the Israel Project. (Machin and Leween 2007; Philo 2011, Richardson & Barkho 2009) The BBC coverage provoked criticism and protests by the Palestine Solidarity Movement and key figures on the British left, leading to pickets outside BBC buildings in towns and cities across the country including Media City Salford and Broadcasting House, London.

In 2014, corporate media channels including the BBC maintained through both images and news stories the framework of Israel as both victim as well as normalised space from which we view 'the other'. On 8 July, the BBC headlined an article, 'Israel under renewed Hamas attack'. The headline was later edited to read 'Israel steps up plans to stop rocket attacks from Gaza' (BBC/Reynolds 8 July 2014) after Owen Jones articulated a widely felt belief of blatant BBC bias and declared 'the macabre truth [is] that Israeli life is deemed by the western media to be worth more than a Palestinian life.' (Jones 9/07/2014) Thousands of pro-Palestinian activists picketed the BBC across the country on the following days demanding 'BBC, tell the truth'. Although the headline of this particular article was altered in the face of criticism, the imagery and video story were left unaltered. The visual narrative documented a city street in Tel Aviv with civilians responding to sirens, a shot of empty streets, then interviews with Israeli shoppers hiding in a store. Following these images, military footage released by the Israeli army present what we are told are Hamas fighters arriving on an Israeli beach. We see live footage of the Israeli military shooting at the four men (distant dots) as they run up a hill. At the end of the narrative is footage of the army amassing on the border with Gaza, this is only after the image of fighters entering Is-

¹ By Zionism I refer to what Alan Hart describes as a 'Jewish nationalism in the form of a sectarian, colonial enterprise which, in the process of creating and then expanding in the Arab heartland a state for some Jews, made a mockery of Judaism's moral values and ethical principles and demonstrated contempt for international law and the human and political rights of the Palestinians.' (Hart 2007)

rael, presenting in the context of the narrative, Israeli actions as self-defense. As with the visual narratives during operation Cast Lead, the BBC through reports such as this established a discourse that normalised the perspective of Israel at the beginning of the bombing campaign through focusing on the experience of Israeli citizens, removing Palestinian civilians from the visual narrative and framing Palestinian resistance fighters (always imaging Hamas) as ant-like dots and therefore impossible to empathise with.

These representations can be seen to reaffirm a discourse that has been carefully developed and supported by an Israeli PR strategy established in April 2009 after the establishment of a UN fact finding mission which accused both Israel and Palestinian militants of war crimes. The Israel Project's 2009 Global Language Dictionary Report outlines guidance for Israeli and Zionist commentators in order to influence public opinion world-wide as effectively as possible. The report provides rules for effective communication. It suggests focusing on 'the persuadables' - those whose opinions can be swayed - and repeats core principles throughout the document that asks communicators: 'to start with empathy for both sides, remind your audience that Israel wants peace and then repeat the messages of democracy, freedom, and peace' over and over again'. (Israel Project 2009) Commentators are asked to focus on highlighting 'shared values' of 'freedom' and democracy and the 'shared values' of fighting 'terrorism', as well as repeatedly asking Palestinians to stop the violence, placing Palestinians within media discourses as the instigator of conflict and Israel as the victim as structured in the BBC report. It suggests ways to address questions about Palestinian self-government to emphasise it as a 'step by step process' so as to push any solutions into the future and dedicates a whole chapter to encourage commentators to 'always distinguish between Hamas and the Palestinian people' with the aim of isolating Hamas, to present them as the obstacle to peace. This last framework, in particular, of Hamas as the perpetrators of continued violence, has been a crucial one within which the current representation of the destruction of Gaza has been framed in corporate media as the first BBC report highlights.

On the same day as the first report was filed, there were 8 other reports on Gaza. Not a single one articulated a Palestinian position, although two reports used footage that documented the impact of air-strikes. These however were framed from the perspective of Israelis with headlines such as 'Israel "ready for escalation" in Gaza conflict'. (BBC/Knell 9 July 2014) While reporting on an Israeli rocket attack on a building in Khan Younis we are not shown any visual evidence of death despite the fact that nine people died, six of them children. We see one man pulled from the rubble but no Palestinian is

named. The story then shifts to the death of 3 Hamas fighters with images focusing on a wrecked car, shots of funeral processions and a graveyard in which the burials are taking place. (Hashash 2006) The visual narrative emphasizes the death of militants rather than those of civilians. The innocence of Palestinian civilians is even marked as conditional by the pointed remark from the presenter standing at the edge of the cemetery who declares: 'just look at the crowds that have turned out to pay their respects'. Such constructions push the Zionist notion that Hamas (pre-coded as aggressor) is everywhere in Gaza, laying a framework of understanding that lends legitimacy to civilian targets. (Weiss 2014)

In reports such as these there is no visual or verbal reference to Hamas as a democratically elected part of a Palestinian unity government and no Hamas government spokesman is imaged or interviewed. It is only the Israeli military spokesperson, Peter Lerner that is given video presence. He is photographed to suggest the image of expert on the ground. Dressed in pale green, and speaking in a quiet tone he is photographed against a background of a built up city-street that is tinged in a gentle pastel pink and is tonally very similar to his uniform. The backdrop is not arbitrary as it is always the same and conjours a feeling of a person that is representing not the army but a densely populated but organized urban region with busy thoroughfares, contrasting with the images of Gaza that visually suggest an environment that is chaotic.

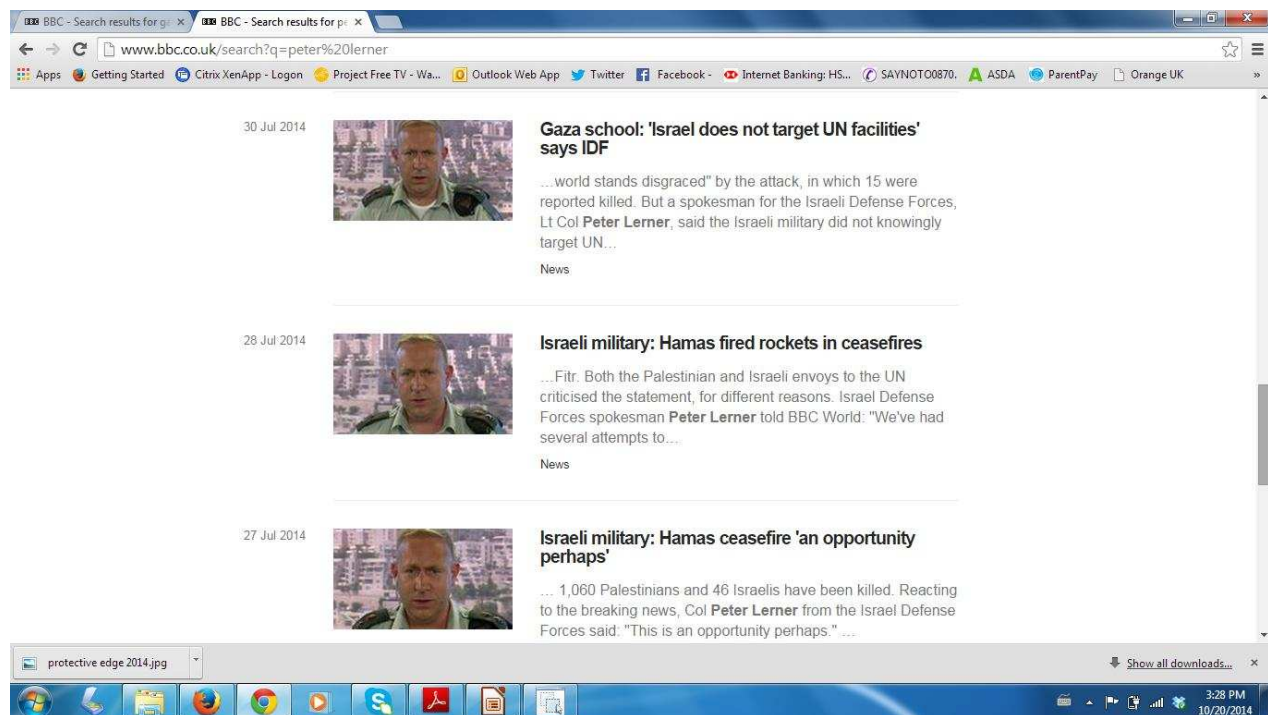


Figure 1 Peter Lerner on BBC news reports

Hamas in contrast to the Israeli army when not represented by their own deaths in funerals are pictured as armed balaclava clad men marching in their dozens. (BBC 8 July 2014) This stereotypical image of Hamas sits in a visual narrative of four photographs in one 8 July report entitled ‘Israel launches new airstrikes on Gaza strip’. (BBC 8 July 2014) The four images characterize the difference between visual representations of Israel and the Israeli military and Palestinians and Palestinian military.

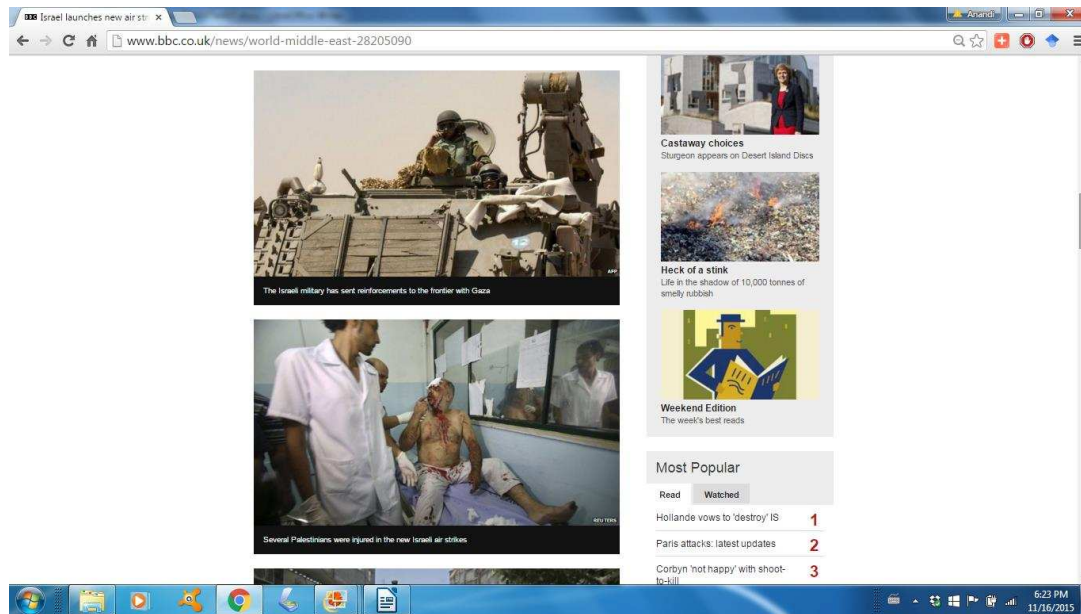


Figure 2 The first two of four images appearing in the BBC report ‘Israel launches new airstrikes on Gaza strip’ bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-28205090

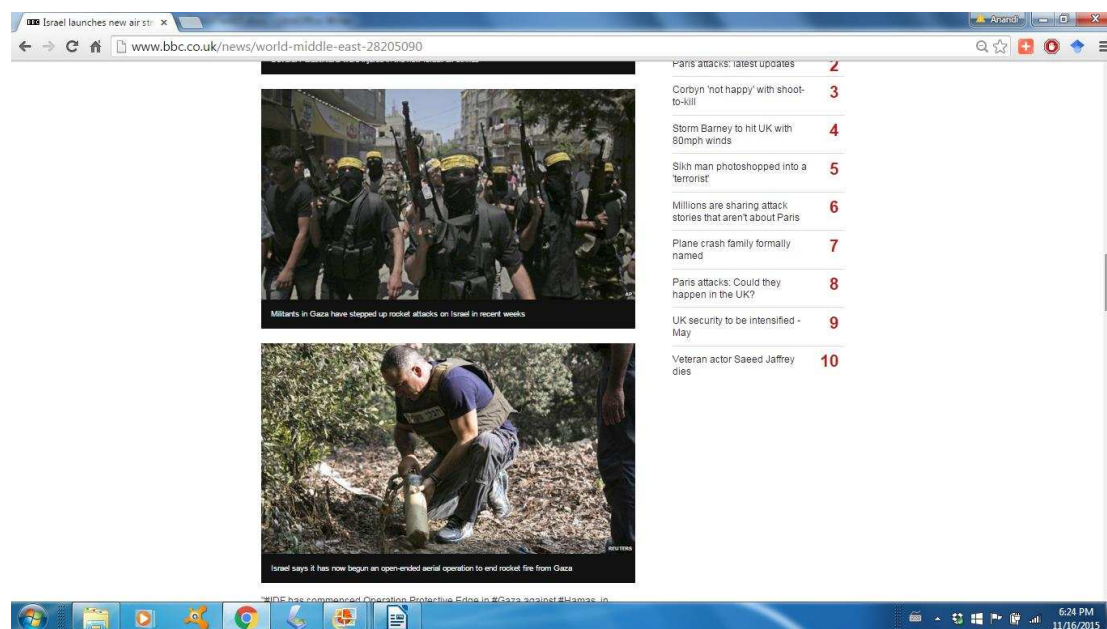


Figure 3 The last two of four images appearing in the BBC report ‘Israel launches new airstrikes on Gaza strip’ bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-28205090

Israeli's and Palestinians are contrasted through the structure of the images. While both the photographs of the Israeli military employ strong horizontal lines, the images representing Palestinians convey a feeling of chaos with sharp diagonals structuring them. The Israeli photographs are in the style of public relations stock photography, where objects are photographed in a shallow de-contextualised space with carefully selected attributes - in this case a tank and a defused bomb - creating generic similarities between these and other corporate photography (Machin & Leeuwen 2007 p152-3) They suggest military strength but not aggression. The photograph of the tank and the bomb disposal expert are tinged in a pastel pink and one of the soldiers' smiles at the camera. It is tonally similar to the landscape behind Peter Lerner in his televised statements, suggesting an image of non-aggression that is reinforced by the task of bomb disposal that aims to minimise casualties. The visual image of Hamas by contrast is tonally the darkest and the most visually oppressive of all the four images. The subjects of the photograph fill the foreground to construct a feeling of no escape. It slides easily into a wider Orientalist discourse, which frames Arabs as autocratic, irrational and violent. (Said 1979, 2008; Richardson, 2004) Such a series of visuals consolidates the Zionist viewpoint of Hamas as an aggressive organisation from which, in Zionist logic, Palestinians themselves should be saved.

The categorization of those that resist colonialism as inhuman has a long history and was often used to delegitimize resistance by the colonized and construct them as savage and autocratic (Webster 2001; Pieterse 1992). As Butler has argued, humanness rather than an attribute of all human beings is used as a differential norm where human has a value which is attributed to some human beings and not to others. (Butler 2007:951) As such she argues it is not necessarily a characteristic that we should seek to embody but one that we need to read and assess as a differential of power manifesting itself culturally and politically. It is within this wider colonial discourse that we need to understand the images of Gaza including the representation of Palestinian resistance to Israeli rule which has been so systematically delegitimized in the mainstream media.

The only discussion of a Palestinian viewpoint on the BBC news website was presented through an analysis of a handful of images on the #GazaUnderAttack feed that attracted 375,000 tweets in 7 days casting doubt on the legitimacy of the hashtag just as it began to be employed by Palestinians and their supporters to highlight the extent of Israeli aggression and violence unmediated by corporates. The discursive frame in which the images by civilians was placed was similar to that during Operation

Cast Lead, - they were categorised by the BBC as political and biased in comparison to news publications that were defined within the report as 'a creditable source'. The fact that corporate news outlets can also fall prey to using inaccurate images was not discussed (Lightbown 2012). While critiquing the twitter feeds of Palestinians, the BBC made no mention of ABC news' misrepresentation of a Palestinian woman in the ruins of her home as Israeli, on the same day as their report. (Khalek 2014) Such inaccuracies generally occur when a 'regime of truth' operates to permit some images to be seen as true and others not. Through this BBC report, the Palestinian position that the channel chose not to represent in more traditional broadcasts was not only 'othered' but de-legitimised. (Philo 2011; Sommers 2014) The BBC focus on an analysis of photographs on the twitter hashtag highlights 'the corporeal politics of pain' that images of horror and suffering continue to have, (Sherr 2013) emphasizing the crucial role of photographs in making meaning about Gaza.

Wider 'economies of regulation' also acted to sanitise the experience of Gaza. Corporate Media channels have increasingly argued that graphic images make viewers uncomfortable. Campbell has highlighted these standards of taste and decency as a form of censorship that became entrenched during the 1990/1 Gulf War where journalists' movement was restricted and the image of the dead body almost disappeared. The shift in the visual depiction of death in line with American military interests suggests the sanitisation of war as having served the interests of aggressors. (Campbell 2006:60) These standards do not simply operate as informal norms, but are also regularised through organisations such as the Press Complaints Commission and the Broadcasting Standards Commission as well as in house regulations such as the BBC's Producer's Guidelines. With regard to the coverage of Gaza, regulatory frameworks of 'taste and decency' served to de-legitimise reports from Gaza as well as those in the Arab media, where media outlets have not been afraid to show the horror of war, including the bodies of dead children. (Fahmy and Johnson 2007) The suggestion that European sensibilities are more delicate than non-European ones reinscribes the East as 'the other' of Europe and denies the reasons why Arab media channels have felt the need to depict such horrors. As Haider Eid argued regarding Gaza: 'the footage of headless toddlers, has ... become the direct message that Palestinians want to use to convey: "This is our daily political reality. This is where we have reached 20 years after the signing of the Oslo Accords." So much for the peace process and the two-state solution!' (Eid 2014)

The censorship of such imagery in the Gaza conflict by corporate media outlets such as the BBC and CNN minimised our understanding of Palestinian suffering and in so doing supported a Zionist agenda.

Throughout July 2014, the BBC, in the name of balance, meticulously maintained a policy of depicting Palestinian suffering alongside Israeli suffering, minimizing a recognition of the disproportionate number of Palestinian deaths. Even the deaths of three teenagers playing football on the beach and then running for their lives as they were gunned down by the Israeli military was 'balanced' with footage from the funeral of the first Israeli soldier killed. In debating the accuracy of the war imagery, the only discussion that took place in the US and UK owned corporate media surrounded the Israeli complaint that they were being represented as inhuman because Hamas militants were not sufficiently visualised in comparison to the Israeli military because they tended not to identify themselves.

Even when images of devastation were depicted, they were framed in media debates surrounding the proportionality of Israel's campaign. As Philo has noted images do not "in themselves affect how audiences see the validity of actions in war". (Philo 2011) The images in newspapers and on television are surrounded by narratives that construct our understanding. (Sontag 2003:89) In a research project analysing the coverage of the 2009 bombing Greg Philo noted: 'There were terrible images of Palestinian casualties but the message from Israel was relentless. Its attack was a necessary "response" to the firing of rockets by Palestinians. It was the Palestinian action that had started the trouble.' (Philo 2011) While Philo was speaking about the 2009 devastation, the same strategies were used by corporate media channels during 2014. In this context the images of devastation (without historical references to the Nakbah in either words or images) only acted to speak of the tragedy of armed conflict, and could even be interpreted to blame Palestinians for the destruction meted out on them.

The images of Gaza in the mainstream media in 2014 acted to feed a media spectacle (Debord 1967) One striking example is Robert Tait and Lewis Whyld's photographs of the devastation in Khuza and Shujaiya through 360 degree panoramas published on the Telegraph website in early August. (Whyld 2014) These photographs depict in slow panoramic movements utter devastation, which is made all the more powerful by the ability of this new type of photography to move about the space of a photograph that has frozen a moment in time. These 360 degree images were taken in moments of inaction. Coupled with the stillness of the image that moves in space but not in time, the image evokes a feeling of paralysis. While the image permits us to witness the full extent of the devastation, the advanced nature of the technology positions our gaze outside that of the Palestinians whose horror is lived in a far less technologically advanced space. We consume their suffering without action, or at the most pay for the guilt that we may feel through a charity donation as Berger observed:

'As we look at [photographs of agony] the moment of the other's suffering engulfs us. We are filled with either despair or indignation. Despair takes on some of the other's suffering to no purpose. Indignation demands action... as we emerge from the photographed moment back into our own lives the contrast is such that any response to the photographed moment is bound to be felt as inadequate.' (Berger 1980:38)

Images on social media platforms

While Berger's reflections on our potential passivity to images of agony are applicable to spaces in which the producers and consumers of media are segregated. Responses to photographs of agony can be potentially more varied in the social media spaces which enable citizens to actively engage in the production of the discursive field (however uneven). Rushdy has argued that "it is possible that pictures of graphic violence still have the power to make an impression" (2000: 77) and to change public opinion. Photographs of disaster as Azoulay has pointed out have often been taken by ordinary citizens since the late twentieth century as an 'exercise of citizenship', (Azoulay 2008: 104) In such circumstances citizens have used photography in partnership with other citizens rather than for a sovereign. What Azoulay highlights here is the breakdown of control over the image which is particularly applicable to the twitter context. Palestinians and their supporters took up their 'civil contract' to reveal the extent of the brutality during the bombing of Gaza and to visualise the imperative to protest and resist. #GazaUnderAttack was one feed that was used to tweet thousands of photographs of destruction caused by Israeli bombing. Framed by hashtag slogans such as 'Pray for Gaza' or 'Gaza under attack' these images were immediately hailed to criticise the Israeli strategy. Given the BBC's active engagement to discredit #GazaUnderAttack, I will focus primarily on images from this hashtag to explore the widening visual discursive field that such tags enabled.

Aouragh has documented how Palestinians have actively used social media to speak truth to power. Young Palestinian bloggers believe: 'the internet is the first mass tool that provides us with direct access to the end user, without falling victim to pro-Israeli editors... so we must use it properly to convince the American people.' (Aouragh 2011:165) In 2014 photographs on social media sites need to be understood as creating attitudes and actions amongst a variety of publics. While the tweeting and

retweeting of images does not automatically mean that these photographs will be read outside of dominant regulatory frameworks, social media can be seen to have permitted frames of resistance in a space less systematically controlled by government and corporates.

The majority of the photographs posted on #GazaUnderAttack mobilized images as evidence and act to bear witness. They included photos that give witness to apocalyptic destruction, photos of war crimes, photos of the dead and wounded, photos of protests against the bombing from across the world along with images of Palestinian' resilience and expressions of hope. Some are hard to stomach but they show us the reality of war. They make visible levels of anguish that are hard to comprehend, such as the image of a grandfather who has lost all his grandchildren, or the images of traumatised children posted by [@DrBasselAbuward](#) (19 August) Many of the images elicit visceral responses, with the image of the innocent dead child playing a central role, offering an affective cry from the heart.



Figure 4 '#Gaza under attack', courtesy Belal Dabour, August 2014

Jones argued that images of abject suffering do not necessarily challenge the dominant discursive frame, since such images position Palestinians as 'the other' through the constant and almost exclusive circulation of images of Palestinians in the context of death and suffering. Such forms of representation make it difficult to empathise with Palestinians as rounded human beings, since they are always placed in the context of experiences that do not match our own. Jones' critique is valid, especially

when we consider the impact of the viral video of Chris Guinness, a spokesman for the UNRWA, breaking down on live television on 30 July 2014. The need for an expression of grief from a white aid worker to be visualised before the suffering of Palestinians could be acknowledged as fully authentic by a wider public indicates the power of the dominant discursive field which constructs Palestinians as less than human.

Twitter hashtags such as #GazaUnderAttack however enabled a range of individuals including doctors, young teenagers, academics and journalists from Gaza to play an active role in the information war. Gazans saw their role in tweeting as integral to the war. The images of mutilated children were therefore placed in feeds that also contained personal statements such as that by Muhammed Suliman that was retweeted 13,000 times: 'I look forward to surviving. If I don't, remember that I wasn't Hamas or a militant, nor was I used as a human shield. I was at home'. The posts were like entries in a diary and photographs were grounded in daily experience: such as the photograph of a journalist in a hospital lift carrying the body of baby who he had elected to bury because all the family were dead, or the image of children's corpses being placed in an ice-cream freezer because there was no space in the morgue.



Figure 5 'Normally children should take icecream from the freezers but in Gaza the store baby corpses', 4 August 2014 (photographer unknown)

These images, often quieter than the dramatic spectacles of destruction provided a diversity of affective triggers to dismantle the Israeli PR machine. The success of this active engagement by citizens can be seen by the numerical success of pro-Palestinian hashtags. By 27 July 2014 #GazaUnderAttack had 5,144,000 tweets with 4,298,000 on #PrayforGaza. In comparison #IsraelunderAttack only had 81,000 with #PrayforIsrael on 96,000 tweets. This difference was despite the Israeli government's attempt to purchase pro-Israeli tweets by promising to pay students' university fees. In such contexts the brutal image played a significant role and should not be dismissed as simply reinscribing hegemonies. As Sontag asserted: 'Let the atrocious images haunt us even if they are only tokens and cannot encompass most of the reality to which they refer, they still perform a vital function.' (2003: 115) The sheer volume of imagery, along with the juxtaposition of wider visual discourses turned despair to indignation to demand action. (Berger 1980)



Figure 6 Picket by Palestine Solidarity Committee, Sheffield, 2 August 2014, courtesy of Palestine Solidarity Campaign, Sheffield

The affective power of photographs saw images from key hashtags find their way onto the streets of Britain and across the world. Protestors held them to demand an end to the bombing and turn the accusations of terrorism onto the Zionist state. As such these images worked to 'other' Israel. The power of images on social media can also be seen by the reenactment of a photograph in Sheffield where one protestor carried a doll, wrapped and bloodied above his head, making direct reference to an image posted to #BBCTrending under the title 'here's a picture for you #BBCTrending', after their critique of #GazaUnderAttack on 7 July. In such actions the images of horror have acted to express affinity and em-

pathy with Palestinians and not simply other them. The possibilities of the active interpretation of imagery by the viewer is a process in which we can reflect on photographs in the context of wider communication ecologies where images will inevitably shift in resonance and meaning depending on their context of use.



Figure 7 Demonstration, August 2014, courtesy of Palestine Solidarity Campaign, Sheffield

While dominated by images of abject suffering, photographs on #gazaunderattack also created a wider set of representations to catalogue a citizens' inventory of actions and experiences to include: images that humanised Palestinians; images of international protests from across the world; images to give visual representation to the siege as well as images to express Palestinian resilience and resistance. This wider discursive field had the potential to alter how we viewed the images of abject suffering. Images to humanise Palestinians included photographs of families on the beach in Gaza during the ceasefire as well as touching images that mixed the ordinary and the extraordinary, such as the photo by one Gazan resident of a 'palace' made from mattresses built by her 8 year old brother for his niece to 'save her from the Israeli airstrikes', (https://twitter.com/Gaza_Samah/status/497761127401406465/photo/1) Such snapshot displays of daily life normalized Palestinians as ordinary human beings, a strategy which the international solidarity movement recognised as crucial through the establishment in July 2014 of two internet based projects, Humanise Palestine and the Gaza Names project to enable us to put faces and names to the dead in Gaza, information that has been largely lacking in the mainstream media.



Samah Migdad @Gaza_Samah · 8 Aug 2014

My bro Anas, 8, built a 'palace' as he called it for Sarah, his niece, to save her from the Israeli strikes!

#Gaza



1.1K



559



Figure 8 'My bro Anas (8) built a 'palace' as he called it for Sarah, his niece, to protect her from the Israeli airstrikes' 8 August 2014 courtesy of Samah Migdad,

To humanise Palestinians it is also essential to understand their history including the Nakbba and the context of their current existence: 'the permanent emergency of catastrophisation' (Campbell 2009). Philo has identified the lack of historical and social context as a key limitation of the way in which corporate news covers the conflict. This visualization of 'regime made disaster' (Azoulay 2013) was mostly limited on #gazaunderattack to infographics or cartoons rather than employing the affective power of photographs. Some rare tweets included photographs of agricultural and industrial devastation posted by Dr Basel Abuwarda, but these were rare images in constant stream of images of abject suffering. <https://twitter.com/DrBaselAbuwarda/status/502281667369639936>.



Dr.Basel @DrBaselGAZA · 22 Aug 2014

More than 360 factories destroyed or damaged + thousands of acres of farmland ruined in [#Gaza](#)

[#GazaUnderAttack](#)



378



83



Figure 9 ‘More than 360 factories destroyed or damaged...’ 22 August 2014, courtesy of Dr Basel Abuwarda

While narrative as Sontag articulates may be the domain of verbal language, photographs were employed periodically to anchor and give haunting presence to an “ongoing, measured and calculated catastrophization” (Ophir). For example, tweeters from a variety of backgrounds used images of people behind bars and grills to visualize the confinement that Gazans face to represent the siege. Other quieter images were posted by international solidarity activists to work alongside text to ask us to question the daily reality for Gazans, with one tweeter attempting to hold the meaning of an image by declaring: ‘If Israel lifted the illegal blockade in [#Gaza](#) they wouldn’t need to live like this’. (@workpsychol 24 August 2014). The photograph images the reduction of life to a horse and cart, a makeshift trolley with empty bottles and a bucket with more empty bottles held by a girl who waits. She can do no more in her circumstance having organized the little she has to transport what we imagine is drinking water. While such images attempt to speak of regime-made disaster, they position Gazans as passive. The lack of Palestinian

agency in changing their conditions in many of these images can be argued to work to limit the representation of Palestinians to those who are worthy recipients of aid, reinscribing the 'otherness' that Jones identifies, although such images are employed by the solidarity movement's campaign for human rights.



Figure 10 'If Israel lifted the illegal blockade on Gaza they wouldn't have to live like this', tweeted by @workpsychol 25 August 2014, (photographer unknown)

Through images of resistance however, two forms of agency did support a repositioning of the dominant discursive field on #Gazaunderattack. Images of protests by the International Solidarity Movement evidenced despair turned to indignation to frame images of devastation and abject suffering as pointers to action. (Berger) Protests by Palestinian citizens in the West Bank were also posted. Western corporate media's almost complete lack of reports and photographs of global protests against the bombing (the BBC news website reported only 10 stories of protests about the bombings during July and August) established such reports as the development of a 'citizenry of photography'. The action by Belgian feminists at Liege airport where they asked 'how many tons of weapons for so many litres of blood' to expose the airport's collaboration in the transportation of arms to Israel, is one example of

protest participation employing photography and its global distribution to increase the impact of actions and call support for the Boycott Divestment and Sanctions Campaign.



Figure 11 'How many tons of weapons for so many liters of blood?' 27 August 2014, courtesy of LilithS

There is no question that protests and demonstrations and their photographic mediation such as this or the image of British activists on the roof of Elbit systems later in August raised the profile and urgency of the plight of the Palestinian people and visualised pointers to action in support of BDS. Knowledge and support for BDS increased during this period (Eid 19/8/2014) These photographs acted to express solidarity with Palestinians and the global sharing of these photographs acted as markers to tell Palestinians that they were not alone. (Ayyash 2014) In 2014 photographs were also not simply used to document protest externally but were also employed in the process of carrying out symbolic actions. During one Boycott Barclays picket in Manchester, passersby stopped to have their picture taken with protestors as a way of interacting and offering support with the protest. They borrowed the Palestinian flag to pose against the backdrop of the picket and recorded themselves with protestors making victory signs for their own social media pages. While protest was actively visualized and tweeted by Palestine solidarity groups and images of protest acted as further calls to action, these images tended to focus on the international solidarity movement's protest participation rather than actions by Palestinians themselves.

On #GazaUnderAttack Palestinian resistance was mainly visualised through photomontage or was articulated photographically through photographs of resilience. The image of a Palestinian girl searching in the rubble for her books went viral as an expression of Palestinian determination to harness education in the face of adversity. Such images were significant in the context of a bombardment that represented the desire by the Israeli military to destroy the will of the Palestinian people. As Blumental revealed, the Israeli army strategy in Gaza was to ‘mow the lawn’ in order to demoralize and crush the will of the Palestinian people. (Blumental 2015) A range of montages to express hope, strength and resistance circulated such as those by Belal Khaled and Imad Abu Shtayeh to combat the Israeli military attempt to destroy the people's will. Belal Khaled’s edited photographs challenge the construction of Gaza as simply one of devastation through the reimagining of clouds of destruction to express resistance and humanity by transforming them into lions that roar, horses that gallop or imagining in them young child angels rising to heaven. (@BelalKhaled 23/7/14)



Figure 12 Horses of Gaza, August 2014, courtesy of Belal Khaled



Figure 13 'We shall return' tweeted 26 August 2014, image by Imad Abu Shtayyah

Following the cessation of the bombing, montages such as those by Imad Abu Shtayeh picturing the nation rising like a phoenix from the rubble acted as metaphors of hope and defiance. This image has since been employed by the solidarity movement on their banners and literature. (PSC 2014) It is significant that such visual statements of resistance were more often metaphorical rather than actual, a result of the dehumanization of Palestinian armed resistance in the mainstream media. There was however the occasional photograph that challenged the dehumanisation of Palestinian armed resistance. One image in particular shared 1,000 times brings together an image of Palestinian humanity and the right to resist: 'A Palestinian kisses the hand of resistance fighter. The fighter refuses and kisses the head of the man [#GazaResists](#)'. The photograph presents an image of the Palestinian fighter which defies the dominant representation of him as the irrational 'terrorist' which circulates in the mass media and challenges the Israeli PRs narrative of Hamas as a force from which Palestinians themselves need to be saved. It is an image full of emotion in which an elderly man, for whom the Nakbah and the devastation of Gaza are not remote historical experiences but make up the narrative of his life, embraces a

soldier who's action of humility creates a touching human moment that defies the dominant discursive frame.



Figure 14 'A Palestinian kisses the hand of resistance fighter. The fighter refuses and kisses the head of the man', tweeted 27 August 2014, photographer unknown.

The images distributed by Gazans and their supporters during the bombing of the strip in July 2014 exemplify the power of people to actively take part to create a citizenry of photography - to speak of disaster in the interest of fellow citizens and document actions, attitudes and events often sidelined or ignored. Images on twitter feeds such as #GazaUnderAttack acted to challenge corporate media frames to name Israel as the aggressor and Palestinians as victims of the destruction. These images however operated in a media landscape that was uneven. Citizens have however actively participated to widen the range of representations of Palestinians, through photographs that humanize as well as through photographs that visualise resilience and hope. In rare instances photographs that humanise Palestinian resistance were also tweeted to create representations that could not be absorbed in the Zionist PR frame. What is less evident is the photographic visualisation of 'regime made disaster', the systematic appropriation of Palestinian land and the oppression of its people, the oppression of the everyday that gives evidence of systemic violence rather than the horrors of war.

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